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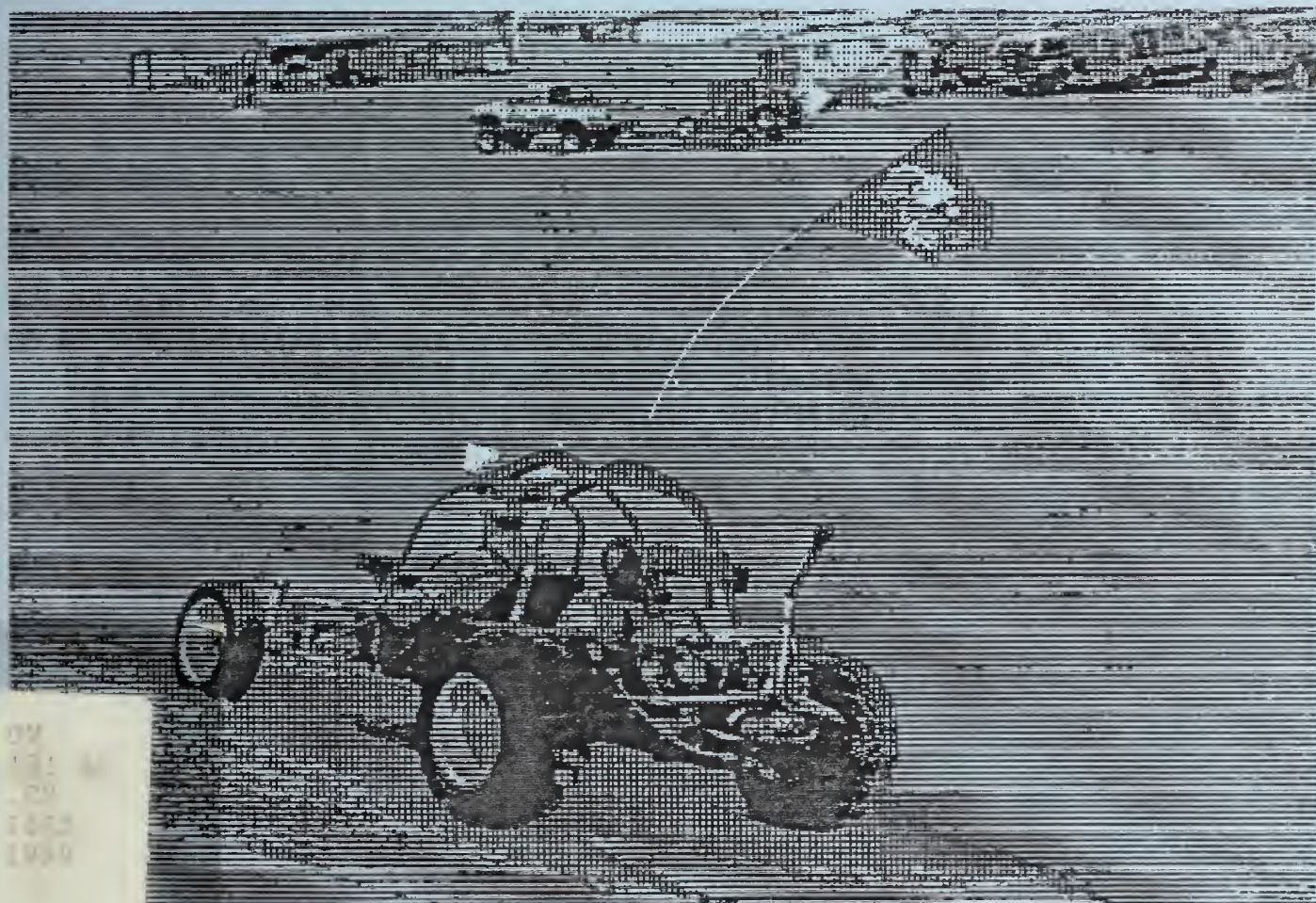
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California State Office  
2800 Cottage Way  
Sacramento, California 95825-1889

October 1990



## Imperial Sand Dunes Off Highway Vehicle Study



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As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interest of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

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## Abstract

The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (over 186,000 acres of public land) is the largest mass of sand dunes in California. It is located in the El Centro Resource Area of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) California Desert District. BLM has responsibility for management of a variety of uses and resources in the area. The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) is an intensely used area, hosting an estimated 792,000 visitor use days in 1985 and projected to attract over 1.6 million use days by the year 2000.

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use is the major attraction for the ISDRA. OHV use and its impacts have been a center of controversy in southern California and the subject of scrutiny in the media. BLM has management responsibility for OHV use on public lands and is continually assessing ways to balance conservation of resources and provision of high-quality recreational experiences.

This case study isolates several issues—safety and emergency services, resource protection and enforcement, public contact and image, interagency relations and visitor services—taking a "snapshot" of current activities and making recommendations for future study and management.

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# Introduction/Background

## The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area

The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) of the Department of Interior (DOI). It consists of 186,991 acres of BLM public lands and 7,580 acres of state and private lands in the El Centro Resource Area of the BLM's California Desert District. Access is provided by State Highway 78 and Interstate 8. The ISDRA is located 40 miles east of El Centro and 20 miles west of Yuma. (See Attachment 1: Map 1 for location of ISDRA).

The ISDRA has been divided into six use areas for management purposes (Mammoth Wash, Glamis/Gecko, East of Glamis (Hwy 78), Gordons Well/Ogilby, Buttercup/Plank Road, and East Mesa. It is one of the most intensely used public land recreation areas in California.

The primary attraction to the ISDRA is off-highway vehicle (OHV) use; there are 118,261 acres designated "open" to OHV use. In 1985, about 792,000 visitor use days (VUDs) were estimated to occur in the ISDRA. Due to the increasing populations of southern California and Arizona, as well as increasing availability and popularity of recreational vehicles, use is predicted to increase to 1.69 million by the year 2000.

Use is concentrated on winter weekends, with Thanksgiving and Presidents' Day weekends seeing huge surges (up to 40,000 visitors) in use.





## Purpose and Objectives of the Case Study

The ISDRA has been studied previously in the 1972 Imperial Sand Hills Management Plan, the 1980 California Desert Conservation Area Plan, and the 1987 Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Management Plan and Environmental Assessment. These plans discussed in great detail natural resources present in the area; major issues and land uses; management objectives, restraints and alternatives; and use allocations.

OHV management presents major challenges to BLM management in California and other states. Recreational use management is becoming more complex as conflicts with other competing nonconsumptive uses (e.g. hiking, bird-watching) rise. Increasing designation of protected areas for threatened and endangered flora and fauna has concentrated use in the remaining open areas. Public demands (both from the recreating and non-recreating public) are changing. Indeed, even the public, itself, is changing due to new demographics. Technology (advent of all-terrain vehicles, mountain bikes) continues to modify the types of use on public lands. Public attitudes (e.g. greater attention to the issue of drunk driving) are also changing.

Public opinions for and against OHV use are polarizing. During the past year, the media has highlighted OHV management in southern California (e.g. Jan/Feb issue of Defenders magazine, television episode of "The West"). OHV use is a key source of controversy in the fight over pending legislation regarding future management of the California Desert Conservation Area.

The purpose of this case study is to take a quick look at current issues in BLM OHV management in California using the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area as a sample area. It is not a detailed study, but is meant to be a "snapshot" of current status of various management practices. It showcases what is working and provides some suggestions on how to improve service in other recreation areas. It also contains recommendations regarding future studies or research which may be needed to address concerns raised by (but beyond the scope of) this study or to address the applicability of recommendations in this study to other California areas or other states.



# Methodology

As part of BLM's continual self-assessment process, the decision was made in January, 1990 to organize a small team to conduct a case study on OHV management (Refer to Attachment 2—Feb. 5 Memorandum to Case Study Participants).

The team consisted of:

- Denise P. Meridith, Associate State Director, BLM CA State Office (Team Leader)
- Dick Barbar, Branch Chief, Lands & Recreation, BLM CA State Office
- Bob Zimmer, Lead Ranger, El Centro Resource Area (RA), BLM California Desert District
- Lee Chauvet, Deputy Director Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation, State of California
- Alan Ewert, Project Leader/Research Scientist, USDA Forest Service
- Tony Staed, Public Affairs Officer, BLM CA State Office

Impacts of OHV use on natural resources are continually being assessed in land use plans and environmental documents. We chose to emphasize a few issues specifically related to human resources in this case study. They were:

Sociological Implications  
Resource Protection and Public Safety  
Visitor Services and Interpretation  
Public Contact and Image  
Interagency Responsibilities

The team took a field tour of the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area during Presidents' Day Weekend (Feb. 17-19, 1990). There the team visited the different use areas, The Glamis store, the Cahuilla Ranger Station, and a nearby hospital in Brawley.

During the ensuing two months, team members did various research on their own (e.g. literature searches of similar studies/surveys in other areas, interviews with local business people, etc), as described in each section. A postcard was developed and distributed to visitors during Easter weekend to gather demographic and other information.

The team reassembled in Sacramento on April 19 to compare notes, share information and brainstorm ideas and suggestions for the documentation of study results. (Refer to Attachment 3—April 23 Memorandum to Case Study Participants).

Individual assignments were made, completed and compiled in this document. Future plans include reviewing the draft with the BLM California State Director, distributing the final document to other offices and setting a schedule for implementation of accepted suggestions and recommendations.



# Sociological Implications

It is impossible to identify management problems or suggest effective solutions without understanding expectations, goals, motivation, incentives, in short, without understanding the customer. Therefore, the key to continuous improvement in OHV management hinges on the agency's knowledge of the people who utilize public lands. While individual managers and employees have substantial experience and personal perceptions about their customers, there is a dearth of documented studies of their sociological or psychological profiles.

The impacts on the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area reflect a combination of recreation technology, a physical resource and a substantial social experience. This social experience entails issues such as visitor behavior, resource stewardship, depreciative behaviors, and visitor satisfaction.

Using a combination of site visitation, participant interviewing, and literature review, the following comments can be made relative to future research opportunities. The following section discusses those comments.

## Findings

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The Imperial Sand Dunes provide an OHV recreational experience for thousands of visitors. A typical situation involves visitors' arrival on a long weekend in family units and formation of "corrals" (circular groupings of vehicles). Moreover, given the terrain, there also exists several "intercept" areas whereby many, if not most, OHV travelers cross through at sometime during their stay. The presence of these "corrals" and "intercept" areas present some interesting research potentials. Other comments can be formed into the categories of demographic information, management preferences, knowledge of land stewardship, sociological implications, and research methods.

### Demographic Information

1. Some demographic information exists about the OHV use in other areas. To date, little systematically collected information on the demographics of the visitor exists for the Imperial Sand Dunes.
2. This lack of information prevents development of more effective marketing and information strategies.



## Management Preferences

1. Doubtless, many of the visitors to the ISDRA have opinions about what their management preferences are. While there exists many opinions, including those expressed during the preparation of the management plan, we currently do not know how the public views facility development, increased law enforcement, or more rules and regulations.
2. Currently, we do not know if there are differential characteristics relative to the terrain (e.g. do more experienced riders prefer and frequent certain more challenging landscapes?). There may be needs to designate and sign areas according to difficulty to reduce conflicts between riders of different skill levels.
3. More information relative to what the public wants and needs from management will increase the probability of making better management-based decisions.

## Knowledge of Land Stewardship/Depreciative Behavior

Ultimately, the public's knowledge of and appreciation of land stewardship and depreciative behavior are related. The development of a suitable land ethic will result in an overall reduction in depreciative behavior (vandalism and other destructive activity).

1. Little information is available concerning the "normative" or standards of behavior practiced by the ISDRA visitor.
2. Moreover, we have few ideas as to how visitors "learn" behaviors or about the network that provides for learning (e.g., television, cultural networks, etc.).
3. Managers and researchers do not have a good idea about what level of knowledge the visitors have about OHV safety techniques, agency rules and regulations, and socially desirable behaviors.

## Sociological/Psychological Dimensions

Far from being merely an academic exercise, understanding the sociological and psychological dimensions of the OHV experience will provide the site managers with a more accurate picture of the OHV visitors, the OHV recreational experience, and useful management techniques (e.g., interpretation efforts, ranger-approach behaviors, and spatial characteristics in placing RV pads).

1. There is little published knowledge about the OHV experience. Consequently, we have little information about what are the important characteristic of the OHV experience and what constitutes a satisfying experience.
2. We also do not know the most effective communication techniques for dealing with the ISDRA's visitor based on a number of variables, including their sociological and psychological characteristics.
3. Initial interviews revealed that some visitors were concerned about the area being proposed for closure.
4. "Head-cowboys" of the corrals (i.e. leaders of family/friend groups) will be important focus points for gaining and giving information.
5. There is approximately a 3-hour "window" to reach OHV riders at corrals (11 a.m. to 2 p.m.). These are periods when post-morning and pre-evening riding are negligible.

## What's Going Well?

Although there currently exists little systematic research findings relative to OHV use, BLM has done a good job of attempting to meet past users' demand within budget and personnel limitations and management seems open to new ideas. In addition, the current and future users would probably welcome future research efforts if the information results in improved ways to managing sites and serving the OHV customer. This is an opportune time to begin a systematic and comprehensive research effort in the ISDRA.

## What's Not Going So Well?

The major concern is the almost complete lack of research-generated information pertinent to this area and applicable to other sites and situations. While the site management team is capable and competent, without research input, the staff is limited to generally using techniques that have been used in the past and relying on information gained entirely through past experience. Changing demographics and public preferences will require new types of facilities, services and information distribution methods. While increasing research will not be a panacea, new and systematic information will provide a better "data base" from which the land manager can operate.

## Recommendations

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To be fully functional, an integrated effort needs to be made between management and research. To provide management with useful information for decisionmaking, any research efforts should be timely and in consultation with field-based agency personnel. Recommendations include the following:

1. The ISDRA's situation should be viewed as part of a broader phenomenon; i.e., the interaction of environmental resources with people and recreation technology.

A research effort should be started immediately investigating the dimensions of demographics, sociological/psychological dimensions, managerial options, and land stewardship. This effort should utilize a two-tiered question approach looking at the level of knowledge and resultant behaviors.

2. The ISDRA represents a good opportunity for interagency cooperation, particularly since the issues and problems transcend agency boundaries. Future research and studies should be cooperatively undertaken by Federal, state and local agencies and private groups.

In summary, the ISDRA is a heavily-used recreational area particularly well-suited for the OHV visitor. Given the high degree of use and public visibility, management decisionmaking should be grounded by the best, most accurate information research can provide.



# Resource Protection and Public Safety

Of immediate and paramount concern to BLM is the protection of the customers discussed in "Sociological Implications" and natural resources on public lands. In the case of the ISDRA, its use has effects in and on the surrounding communities, as well as the open area itself. It is the public safety problems associated with the ISDRA and its surroundings which have received the greatest attention from the media. This section will discuss the team's findings and recommendations associated with public safety.

## Findings

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### Community Impacts

In order to obtain information on how OHV activity affects the surrounding communities the following people were contacted by telephone and the following information obtained:

Kevin Kelly (El Centro Chamber of Commerce)

Positive Impacts: Increase in gas and fast food sales.

Negative Impacts: None

Harry Jensen (Brawley City Manager)

Positive Impacts: Increase in gas and fast food sales

Negative Impacts: Increase in traffic, stress on emergency room at Pioneer's Memorial Hospital, and Fire Department response (rare).

Positive impacts out-weigh negative impacts.

Susan King (former manager of Gold Cross Ambulance Service)

Positive Impacts: Increase in business

Negative Impacts: Servicing ISDRA leaves other areas with less coverage during ambulance runs.

Dan Doran (Assistant City Administrator)

Positive Impacts: Economic, increase in sales of gas.

Negative Impacts: None

When questioned about accidents affecting the smooth operation of the hospital, he stated the hospital was large enough to absorb the traffic.



## Accidents

Several alcohol-related accidents occur each year in the ISDRA (no statistics available). It is common to see a person driving a vehicle and drinking alcohol at the same time or to see someone drink alcohol and immediately thereafter drive off on/in a vehicle. This makes for a potentially dangerous situation. Even if an accident does not result, the mere impression a casual observer forms of OHV'ers is not a desirable one. Opponents of the BLM use this as ammunition in their arguments that BLM is a poor guardian of our public lands by condoning such irresponsible activity.

## What's Going Well?

On the positive side, all BLM Ranger and Visitor Services Specialists (VSS) are emergency trained and equipped. Several safety presentations are given each year and Rangers and VSS personnel continually warn visitors of potential dangers associated with OHV use on public lands. In addition, the BLM boasts an active volunteer Dunes Patrol in the ISDRA. Rangers actively enforce existing Federal and State laws. Supplemental rules of conduct relative to whip antennas, glass containers and speed limits have been promulgated.

## What's Going Not So Well?

Many problems of enforcement on public lands are related to a lack of legislation, regulations and jurisdiction related to enforcing drunk driving penalties in cases involving OHVs.

There is a need for uniform enforcement of safety rules through statewide policy. These may be related to uneven availability and distribution of ranger personnel. Some areas have more rangers than others and in some areas other priorities (sensitive area management, drug interdiction) may compete for rangers' limited attention. There are also differences in rangers' individual knowledge of policies and regulations related to OHV use and safety violations.

Finally, there will always be a limitation to personnel available to enforce these laws at key times. There are eight rangers stationed in the El Centro Resource Area, who have many duties besides patrol of the ISDRA. During Thanksgiving Day weekend there can be up to 30,000 people in the ISDRA area, making effective enforcement (regardless of the numbers of assigned skilled rangers) under current circumstances difficult.

## Recommendations

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1. Petition the State of California to change sections 23220, 23221, 23222, 23223, 23224, 23225, 23226, and 23229 of the California Vehicle Code, which govern alcohol/drug use and driving, to include off-road vehicle travel (not limit these sections to only highway travel).
2. Provide more thorough training of rangers and managers (e.g. Drunk driving training for all BLM Rangers, recognition of Driving Under the Influence (DUI), breathalyzer certification training, etc.) to facilitate uniform enforcement of various laws on public lands throughout the state.
3. Encourage other Resource Areas to make their Rangers available to assist on special assignments in areas of high OHV use during major weekends.



4. Require strict enforcement of all safety regulations (38503 - 38506; BLM supplemental regulations; drunk driving and other rules encouraging helmet-wearing, no double-riding and other safety precautions).
5. Continue formal safety presentation by VSS personnel. Continue educating public on hazards of operating OHV's on public lands through informal contacts by Rangers and VSS.
6. Continue Dunes Patrol support.
7. Enlist aid of outside groups (e.g. MADD, SADD, American Motorcycle Association, local businesses, etc) to assist in training and educating the OHV customers and community residents.
8. Involve manufacturers and dealers in effort to encourage safe use of OHVs through ads, sponsorship of rider education programs and other training.
9. Revise existing 43 CFR 8341 to specifically address regulations governing driving under the influence and make them consistent with State law.

Refer also to "Visitor Services" and "Public Contact" sections for recommendations which would also benefit public safety.



# Visitor Services and Interpretation

The ISDRA Management Plan outlines many visitor services-related recommendations and the Resource Area (RA) has diligently tried to implement as many as possible. It is fortunate that the use of State OHV funds have provided a key ingredient on providing staff and facilities on site. Effective and efficient Visitor Services are key ingredients in solving management problems in the ISDRA and other OHV areas.

## Findings

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In the short period of time devoted to on site visits and interviews, personal observation does not capture the essence of overall management of visitors and delivery of services. However, subsequent discussions with local RA staff and others, including users, added to these personal observations and documented evidence.

The very nature of OHV recreation in this area embodies use patterns that can be dangerous; require unique and innovative management measures; require endurance of generally hostile working conditions (sand, wind, heat), encourage turnover in BLM personnel; cause severe depreciative behavior (drinking, vandalism, etc.) by the users; and could pose a threat to significant biological values. This all poses significant challenges for BLM management and staff responsible for providing efficient visitor services and effective interpretation.

### What's Going Well?

#### Planning and Implementation

On the whole, the commitment to effective visitor management and resolution of conflicting uses by the RA staff is evident and must be commended.

The adoption of the ISDRA Management Plan was the keystone in the logical development and direction of recreation use relative to natural values and resource capacities.

Basic inventory of OHV use impacts on key resources is being conducted through an OHV-funded grant. The monitoring provides site specific indications of overuse and acceptable levels of activity.

#### Contributed Funding and Volunteers

Another key factor in the success to date is the funding source provided by the State's OHV grant program. This has helped make up the difference between management needs and the lack of available BLM funding in recreation during the past decade for visitor services. This partnership has proven to be the catalyst to implement the key facility developments, staffing and equipment, so critical to proper management of the area.

User involvement is important to any management scheme. Fortunately, after a shaky start, the volunteer Dune Patrol has become an effective body in providing needed services including safety patrols, cleanups, information, and assistance in area maintenance and monitoring of use.

With the use of OHV funds, the RA has increased staff, particularly enforcement rangers and maintenance staff.

### Customer Attitudes

Visitors have generally responded positively to the increased facilities and agency enforcement. Most are generally pleased with the Bureau's efforts to meet the needs for camping, sanitation, trash and access. The RA staff has initiated programs of visitor contact during high use periods.

Due to the relative homogenous nature of the OHV use in this area, conflicts with other recreation use types is negligible. This might not be the case in other areas of the state where OHV use occurs.

## **What's Not Going So Well?**

### Agency Funding

Current funding levels rely almost exclusively on State OHV funds. El Centro RA receives approximately \$700,000 annually for Operations & Maintenance (O&M). This is approximately 50% of the Statewide BLM total of OHV O&M funds annually and 75% of the CDD total. The O&M funds are reviewed annually with no assurance of constant levels. Reductions on any given year by the State would leave the Bureau with no recourse but to reduce staff, forego facility maintenance and fail to protect resources and meet human safety requirements. The availability of funds has encouraged staffing levels, facility development, and enforcement above normal Bureau standards. Although funds are provided based on OHV use and user support the reliance on OHV funds has jeopardized the Bureau's ability to properly manage the area in the face of potential State-mandated cutbacks in funding. Another factor at issue is the external pressure on Bureau management of the area by some OHV Commissioners and users who assume use of user generated funds allows the right to dictate levels of development and maintenance without sufficient understanding or consideration of Bureau legal and policy mandates.

### Customer Data and Attitudes

Consistent with the findings in the "Sociological Implications" section, little is understood about visitor profiles, origins, patterns of use, expectations, levels of awareness of public land policy, attitudes, and behavioral characteristics. In an area which receives visitation upward of 40,000 people on a three day holiday, certain characteristics of use must be understood and accommodated.

While no definitive picture of customer attitudes about the use of the area is available, general perceptions relate visitor expectations as ones of unregimented, uninhibited opportunity, to escape from the routines of work and urban discipline. Though not universal with customers, enough disregard accepted social behavior while in the area to create enforcement and safety problems for the whole. When associated with the elements of driving speed and alcohol cited in the Public Safety section, the critical factors stimulate serious situations. Behavior exhibited many times in the public land areas would not be allowed in other settings. The existing perceptions of minimal BLM control of visitor use contributes to the situation.



While there is little conflict between OHV and other customers, conflicts do exist between types of OHV's (ATV's, Buggies, etc); these conflicts are compounded by topography, density of users, inadequate control and rider safety and require more study.

### Customer Services

The current approach to dealing with the intensive management situation in the area is what might be expected with overwhelming odds—react to the problems the best we can, knowing that it may be below the level of adequacy desired. One indicator of this approach is the lack of customer services orientation in the area, there is a "we"/"they" attitude relative to Bureau staff and users, compounded during times of enforcement or emergency services. Virtually all user contact takes place on-site with little outreach. Customer services including rider education, environmental education, interpretive services and user information relative to area use need strengthening. Emphasis on staffing has been on enforcement and maintenance complicated by having to patrol the North Algodones Dunes WSA. The "Cahuilla Ranger Station" is viewed by users as just that—a place for the rangers not for the public. While the BLM effort at a visitor contact area in the station is commendable, most visitors don't know its available or are intimidated by the "stockade" look of the facility.

### Planning and Implementation

While the ISDRA Management Plan is a sound guideline, it doesn't provide detailed guidance for visitor management. Two key planning guides are lacking: an interpretive plan and a communication strategy. There is great opportunity for increasing environmental education in the ISDRA (e.g. "Desert Awareness" events could be developed to increase customer awareness of outdoor ethics, resource values, and safety).

Similarly, communications with the visitor need to be more comprehensive. Although one-to-one field contacts are made they are not an effective way to communicate with the large number of users who visit the area. Currently, there is no overall communication strategy incorporating a variety of communication media (flyers, mailers, maps, radio broadcasts, posters, and signs).

Currently biological monitoring outlined in the Management plan is just being initiated; this effort is geared toward sensitive plant and animal species. A more comprehensive monitoring effort is needed to assess effectiveness of the Management Plan in customer-related areas (e.g. visitor use impacts on facilities and uses areas, change in visitor preferences).

Another concern is the monitoring of user demand/preference for facilities, services and locations of use. Since the completion of the management plan, considerable development has been completed and proposed. Evaluation of effectiveness or adequacy should be initiated. User review of OHV funding requests usually generates questions relative to need, costs and/or design. There appears to be no regular visitor use analysis to monitor trends.



# Recommendations

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Recommendations encompass the areas of communications, customer data, funding, and management/implementation.

1. Develop an umbrella communications strategy for the Sand Hills area. This could include: 1) Interpretive services plan to guide environmental education efforts, awareness programs, safety themes, and responsible behavior; 2) sign plan to coordinate types, locations, design and materials used in public information; 3) visitor information plan to disseminate information through various media, including maps, electronic media, mailings, outreach points of contact, written documents such as, brochures, flyers, posters, etc.
2. Initiate (in FY 91) visitor use studies to gather key visitor information for guiding contact efforts; facility developments; staffing mix; and maintenance levels. Specific information on user preferences, patterns of use, equipment types, awareness of public land policies are some of the key data needed. OHV funding should be used to support this.
3. Specific budgetary policy needs to be developed in using OHV funds-particularly in the ISDRA. Starting with FY 92 preparation of annual work plan and program year budgets should attempt to reflect a greater proportion of Federal appropriations. New facility developments using OHV funds should only be considered if O&M funding is available using a proper agency subactivity funding (7123/4333/4712) mix. State budget cuts for FY 92 will spur this process. The District needs to consider this in their 5 year budget.
4. To combat a lack of respect for BLM public lands, specific efforts at public awareness of BLM lands should start in areas such as the ISDRA. Management and regulators must consider a "zero tolerance" policy relative to alcohol consumption, careless off road driving, violation of resource protection requirements and safety violations. This approach needs to be made highly visible to the public.
5. Initiate a monitoring effort to assess effectiveness of the Management Plan implementation re: customer services.
6. Conduct an evaluation of the OHV program on public lands in California to assess comparative progress and needs throughout the state.
7. A specific initiative should be developed to stress the "Customer Services" vision of visitor management. Specific approaches which provide high visibility need to be identified. Of particular need is to make the Cahuilla Ranger Station a more customer friendly place. Enforcement personnel need to be more involved in interpretive programs and the Dune Patrol could expand their efforts in leading fun rides. Any efforts to change the "we" / "they" attitude should be encouraged.

# Public Contact and Image

Several opportunities exist for improving service to our visiting publics in the ISDRA, as well as enhancing management effectiveness. A few efforts well focused might significantly strengthen the recreation experience and increase everyone's appreciation of the Dune's ecosystem.

The ISDRA provides a unique recreation opportunity to a large number of dune buggy enthusiasts of which a majority seem to reside near the southern coast of California, particularly in the San Diego and Los Angeles metropolitan areas.

These recreationists are enjoying the use of the ISDRA and many opportunities exist for BLM not only to ensure that their visits are fully enjoyable, but to expand their knowledge and appreciation of the many diverse and important natural resources in the area.

## Findings

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On several occasions during the 1980's, discussions with BLM managers and staff have centered on personally greeting visitors who enter the ISDRA. Vehicles come and go at various entry points without the reception of a friendly BLM smile or wave. These gestures, particularly when large numbers of vehicles arrive on weekends, would provide substantial image building and respect for the local BLM staff and office. The National Park Service has seen the importance of the friendly greeting at most entrance sites as a way of doing business. BLM often is unable to do this because of the multiplicity of recreation site entrances, but with the ISDRA, there is opportunity to carry out this type of program.

As stated earlier, the Ranger Station does not seem to be used by visitors unless they are in trouble. It might be beneficial to find ways that would make the station more attractive by having personnel outside to greet vehicles on weekends. An opportunity is being missed to hand each vehicle a flyer which shares information on nature walks to the Area of Critical Environmental Concern and interpretive talks/slide shows/videos held throughout the day and evening. Inside the station more information including a slide or video program could be available for immediate use. Perhaps the station through its use of volunteers could offer snacks, soda, etc., to enhance visitor convenience and assist BLM in paying for additional services.

There are no kiosks at the several entry points or other sites at the ISDRA. On major weekends volunteers or BLM personnel could be present at some of the kiosks for sharing interpretive or safety information. Some kiosks might have handouts and automatic audio tape displays whereby visitors need not leave their vehicle to gain prompt information on weather, natural resources, or events of the day conducted by BLM and the volunteers. There is no way to clearly identify and keep in contact with customers.

Consideration should be given to establishing a computerized visitor mail list whereby visitors freely give their addresses to BLM so that they receive information periodically from the local BLM office about pertinent items concerning the ISDRA itself and nearby BLM happenings of interest.

The ISDRA offers opportunities for visitors to visit sites other than the play area itself. Programs might be regularly scheduled, day and evening, for rides or hikes to other parts of the RA to observe plants, wildlife, minerals, etc. These should be advertised in advance through the mail list system and publicized with a free handout when visitors are greeted at entry points for the weekend.

The ISDRA offer opportunities for a special BLM initiative with corporations and organizations to reach out to diverse populations in urban areas to visit and experience the ISDRA for a weekend. A special program like "Teens to the Sands" might well be developed by the local BLM staff to enhance understanding of the ISDRA and BLM as well as help some young adults experience and obtain a respect for natural resources and land management.

Most of the recommendations were generally covered under the ISDRA plan and are reiterated here for emphasis.

## Recommendations

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1. Develop a Public Lands Education Program to serve all visitors. The program would include brochures, slide shows, and video tape on the ISDRA ecology, as well as nature walks and campfire programs on a regularly scheduled basis.
2. Develop a Customer Service Program to assist BLM staff and volunteers in using Total Quality Management Principles to improve greeting and interpretive services for visitors.
3. Develop a computerized mail list system to share with visitors recreational and related information about the ISDRA.
4. Build kiosks and related facilities that will promote opportunities for visitors to be better informed of opportunities on the ISDRA for recreation and natural resource education.
5. Approach corporate and public interest organizations with a recreation/natural resource education proposal to assist young adult in visiting and experiencing the ISDRA.
6. Encourage use of volunteers, sponsorship from diversified ethnic, gender and racial backgrounds.
7. Analyze and prepare a marketing program for the ISDRA. Care needs to be taken to address the primary marketing needs including, at least: expected behavior, outdoor ethics, diversity of recreation opportunity with understanding of public land values.



# Interagency Responsibilities

The management of the ISDRA is a complex task. Any actions to adequately manage off highway vehicle use will require a concerted effort of a myriad of agencies, users and industry groups.

## Findings

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The implementation actions of ISDRA requires close adherence to the management plan prepared for the area. Day to day management of the area must utilize an interface of coordinative actions between various levels of governments, types of services, funding services and regulatory bodies.

### What's Going Well?

**Industry Cooperation** - American Honda has long been a key supporter of proper OHV management in ISDRA. That group has spent time and funds in providing garbage collection, safety training, equipment donations and rider education.

**California Highway Patrol** - The ECRA has coordinated enforcement of OHV laws with the local CHP office. Currently they have initiated a system of recording federal OHV offenses on the State system through the CHP. Additionally, CHP has cooperated by participating in vehicle compliance checks.

**Imperial County** - Imperial County Sheriff has entered into an agreement to deputize BLM Rangers to enforce State laws (including OHV laws). Sheriff cooperates by providing deputies at ISDRA on heavy use periods.

**State Department of Parks and Recreation** - has been extremely supportive of the funding requirements for implementing the ISDRA Management Plan.

**Local Governments** - The cities of El Centro and Brawley have been continually supportive of the OHV use at ISDRA. Fire and emergency services have been provided.

**Military** - The ISDRA is located in military aircraft operating areas. Both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corp have continually provided assistance as necessary for medical evacuation and ordnance disposal.

**California Department of Transportation** - has provided road and rest stop maintenance along I-8 where it crosses ISDRA. Has cooperated in protection of resources, fencing, and clean up in the area.

## What's Not Going So Well

Although many agencies participate in the management of ISDRA the complexity of use requires a concentration of agency efforts in order to prevent duplication and fill voids in needed actions. Regular coordination meetings of all involved agencies/organizations are not held. Input from the industry sector is not strongly felt. How enforcement assistance needs to be coordinated and focused to deal with the high use periods.

## Recommendations

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1. Establish an interagency group to regularly review the ISDRA operation issues and collectively agree on coordinative actions.
2. Develop a cooperative agreement with Department of Parks and Recreation to share ranger personnel from Ocotello Wells SVRA, or other SVRA's, during high use periods.
3. Create closer working ties with CALTRANS to coordinate facility development (Visitor Center) and maintenance along the I-8 corridor.
4. Organize a group of manufacturers/dealers to support safety training, rider education, point of sale information, and volunteer projects. Emphasize ISDRA as a Showcase Area for proper management and cooperation.
5. Clearly address the law enforcement coordinator issues by utilizing a close working relationship between BLM, Sheriff and CHP relative to ISDRA.



# Conclusions

The challenges facing agency managers and staff related to management of OHV open areas such as the ISDRA are immense. The technology, customer demography and density, customer needs and expectations, public attitudes about OHV activities and drug- or alcohol-impaired drivers are changing. Legislation, regulations, funding, staffing and lack of documented data about who the customer is and what he/she wants and needs and other restrictions limit the agency's ability to respond quickly and effectively to these changes. Lack of information, misinformation, personal biases and media scrutiny all aggravate the situation.

But there are many positive accomplishments in the ISDRA Recreation Area which should be documented and shared with other resource areas. There are also many opportunities which can be developed to improve management here and throughout the state.

Each section listed many recommendations to improve customer service and area management, which should be considered in future plans and implemented as funding and personnel become available.

But the following recommendations are the most significant and require immediate attention:

1. Increase efforts to improve enforcement of existing laws and regulations pertinent to public safety, drinking and driving, and public drunkenness:
  - Encourage uniform enforcement of all safety regulations statewide
  - Continue efforts to increase uniformed ranger presence, especially during heavy use weekends
  - Continue/increase use of Dunes Patrol volunteers
  - Work with the State to either clarify existing laws or get new laws introduced to deal with drinking alcohol while driving off-highway vehicles
2. Develop an umbrella communications strategy for the Sand Hills area. This should include: 1) Interpretive services plan to guide environmental education efforts, awareness programs, safety themes, and responsible behavior; 2) sign plan to coordinate types, locations, design and materials used in public information; 3) visitor information plan to disseminate information through various media, including maps, electronic media, mailings, outreach points of contact, written documents such as, brochures, flyers, posters, etc.; and 4) more effective use of mailing lists to distribute information about the ISDRA.

3. Increase emphasis on monitoring, tracking and evaluation. Continue efforts to improve monitoring of visitor use in the ISDRA and to track implementation of the Management Plan. Conduct a statewide evaluation of OHV program in California to generate more ideas about improving resource protection, public safety, image, visitor services and interagency cooperation.
4. A specific initiative should be developed to stress total quality management and customer service. Components would include designs for making the Cahuilla Ranger Station more "user friendly," more of a visitors center; including interpretive and communication training requirements in Individual Development Plans of rangers and other Bureau personnel; and greater use and training of volunteers.
5. Develop a research and study plan which would identify efforts needed to investigate demographics, sociological/psychological dimensions, agency/public interactions, management options, monitoring needs involving OHV use in southern California. Priorities, costs, time frames, target areas and populations, and sources of information are important components.
6. Prepare a local marketing program for the ISDRA. Initiate contact with private groups (American Motorcycle Association, hospitals, MADD/SADD, manufacturers, etc), volunteers, schools and universities, Advisory Council members, and other agencies to begin identifying, developing and promoting safety-related and resource appreciation ideas and programs. Encourage more involvement with minority groups. Encourage more employee suggestions related to this effort. Publicize positive events via articles, videos, and public service and volunteer awards.
7. Incorporate increased federal funding into FY 1991 budget development for the IDSA. Begin development of FY 1992 budget to include a greater mix of federal and state funds. Include integrated funding into the District five-year budget development.

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